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ZNY SSSS ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8309
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0059
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0057
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 5901
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000081

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E.O. 12598: DECL: 01/11/2016
TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA - PDP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE
YARQADUA ASSURES U.S. OF FRIENDSHIP, SUPPORT

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Classified by Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 15
(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: I called on Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate Alhaji Umaru Musa YarQadua at a private residence in Abuja on January 11. He commented on the style of his potential presidency which would be characterized by an active, outward looking foreign policy and continuation of President Obasanjo's economic reforms. He assured that he would campaign vigorously, visiting all 36 states as well as the neighboring states of Benin, Cameroon, Niger and South Africa. He was thoughtful on the Niger Delta. He acknowledged health problems in the past. In para 7 below, I comment on his personal style as I was able to observe it in a single meeting that lasted less than an hour. End summary.

¶2. (U) Accompanied by Polcouns, I called on Katsina Governor YarQadua at a private house in Abuja; the meeting had been set for the Katsina Governor's lodge, but, upon arrival there, a member of YarQadua's staff led us to a private residence a mile or so away. There was no press, and YarQadua was on time. He was accompanied only by his hand-picked gubernatorial candidate for Katsina and a long-time mission contact, Ibrahim Shema.

¶3. (U) I opened by congratulating him on the PDP nomination and then spoke about the importance of credible elections in April. I observed that the first transfer of authority from one civilian president to another in May will be a milestone for Nigeria's democratic development. I briefed him on the assistance the USG provides through NGOs to the Independent National Electoral Commission, for voter education, and for strengthening political parties. I commented on Nigeria's highly positive role, under the leadership of President Obasanjo, on a host of African regional and other international issues, and its signal contribution to peacekeeping. I closed by raising our concerns about the Delta.

¶4. (C) In reply, YarQadua agreed that credible elections are essential to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Presidency. He promised to wage

a vigorous campaign, visiting first each of the geo-political regions, then all of the 36 states, and concluding his travel plan with visits to Nigeria's neighbors: he mentioned specifically Benin, Cameroon, Niger, Chad and South Africa. I had observed that being President of Nigeria was one of the most difficult jobs in the world. He said that it need not be so if the President adhered strictly to the constitution and the rule of law. (In the context of our conversation, he was clearly implying that President Obasanjo had not.) He promised to continue to reform the Nigerian economy and society. He emphasized that to succeed, he would need the cooperation of the political class and all Nigerians.

¶ 15. (C) YarQadua provided assurances that Nigeria's active international role would continue, Qnot least because it is in our own national interest.Q With respect to the Delta, he said, he would first seek to restore the region's trust in the Federal Government by developing and implementing extensive development programs; he said he is already talking to Delta stakeholders about how to do this. Once trust is restored and people can see economic development, he thought much of the local support for militias would dissolve. I briefed him on the Washington/London process and progress to date. When I asked if he had a message he would like passed to Washington, he replied that it was to provide his assurances of Nigeria's deep and abiding friendship for the United States, which he characterized as Qour elder brother.Q

¶ 16. (S) I asked YarQadua about his health. He said that in 2000, he had been treated for high blood pressure and had gone to Germany for diagnostics. While there, kidney disease had been identified, and

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he was placed on dialysis. Since then, he had returned to Germany every six months for monitoring. But, now, he is no longer on dialysis, and he goes to Germany only once a year. At present, he continued, he is healthy, and said his blood pressure is 130/80. His kidneys operate at fifty percent of their former capacity.

¶ 17. (S) Comment: As others have reported, I found YarQadua to be shy, diffident, and thoughtful. Like much of the Northern elite, his manners are characterized by deep courtesy. He is articulate and his English is excellent, though clearly it is his second language and he occasionally must hunt for the right word. (Katsina is almost entirely Hausa speaking.) His style is very far from the outgoing vigor, if not bombast, characteristic of many Nigerian politicians. At least in a small meeting, he is the antithesis of charisma or drama. I take at face value his statements that Nigeria would continue an outward looking foreign policy characterized by deep friendship for the United States. His diffidence lends credence to the nearly universal view here that he did not seek the presidential nomination, but had it thrust upon him by President Obasanjo. However, his reference to the requirement in a democracy that the President adhere to the rule of law may indicate that he is already distancing himself from President Obasanjo. There were no visible health impediments to the viability of his candidacy, at least from the perspective of this non-specialist observer. It remains to be seen if the PDP will rally around him (see El Rufai's comments, Septel), and if he is able to generate popular support.

CAMPBELL